

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee and the subcommittee on Education,

My name is Maria Camila Bortolletto and I currently live in Brookfield, CT. I am here to speak on of support of S.B. 1095: An Act Concerning School Resource Officers and in opposition to SB1096 An Act Concerning The Charter School Approval Process.

I am an alumni of Danbury Public Schools, having attended elementary, middle, and high school in the Danbury school system. I am also the Co-Executive Director of CT Students for a Dream (C4D), which is a statewide, youth-led network that fights for the rights of undocumented immigrant youth and their families. Today I am speaking from my personal perspective as a former student in Danbury Public Schools, and as someone who works with immigrant students in Danbury as part of my work with CT Students for a Dream.

I stand in support of S.B. 1095: An Act Concerning School Resource Officers. All students deserve to feel safe, secure, and supported in their places of learning. Yet too often our schools rely on policing to keep children in line, rather than funding professionals who are trained in providing developmental and behavioral health resources to students.

According to research by [Connecticut Voices for Children](#), there's no evidence School Resource Officers (SROs) make students or staff safer, in fact schools with SROs have more arrests and more expulsions than their peer institutions without SROs. [Students](#) in schools with SROs were over three times more likely to be arrested than students in schools without SROs. For Black and Latino/a/x students, the risk of arrest was over five times higher in schools with SROs than in schools without SROs. [Students](#) in schools with SROs were 1.58 times as likely to be expelled as those without an SRO. The risk of expulsion was even greater for Black and Latino/a/x children. Research shows that the presence of SROs in schools increases the likelihood of discipline and arrest for Black and Latinx students, without providing measurably better educational or safety outcomes.

S.B. 1095 is a step towards building an educational system that centers the social-emotional well-being of students through care, resources, learning, and restoration, and I hope the Committee supports it.

I stand in opposition to SB1096 which would take away the democratic oversight over the approval and funding of new charter schools. I ask the committee to keep the existing process, which gives the public and elected legislators a voice. Instead of taking funds out of our schools to fast-track the creation of new charter schools, the legislature should fully fund and staff our public schools.

Currently, all public school funding is approved by the legislature, which as you know is elected by voters and hears testimony from the public, like today. We cannot take away that democratic oversight from the legislature and the public, and hand over this important decision to an appointed board with no accountability to the community. The existing process gives the public and elected legislators a voice. SB 1096 would silence our voice.

The existing process was established in 2015 because the charter school process was not transparent. Connecticut made that change for a reason. We need more transparency and accountability of charter schools, not less. I urge the committee to not support 1096 and keep the approval process the way it is now, with public and legislator accountability.

Danbury Public Schools are severely underfunded. I see that now in my work with youth in Danbury, and I saw it when I was a student myself. Danbury has one of the lowest per pupil school expenditure at \$13,521¹. Neither the city of Danbury nor the state of Connecticut have met their financial obligations to the Danbury Public School System. Danbury Public Schools have not had a fully-funded municipal budget in nearly 20 years. The state's ECS formula has not been fully funded either. This underfunding has been compounded over decades and fixing it won't be overnight.

I loved attending Danbury schools, the diversity in languages and cultures of the student body, the teachers, and the community was amazing. We deserved more, the students I work with today deserve more. The solution to these issues is more funding for the Public School System and its current schools.

Funding another model, a new charter school, that will serve only a fraction (less than 6%) of our students is not the answer to the chronic underfunding of Danbury Public Schools and it does not make fiscal sense. It doesn't benefit most of the students that the school system serves. A charter school in Danbury will contribute to the underlying funding problem in Danbury Public Schools by drawing more funds away from the public school system. The public deserves to have a voice in this choice.

As an alumni of Danbury Public Schools I urge you to take steps to fully fund Danbury Public Schools and to consider the impact to the current schools and our students if financial support is provided to a facility that will compete with it for funding. If you want to put more education dollars into Danbury, please do it by providing funding to the current public schools and the whole system as part of a long term solution as face an increasing student population.

Thank you,

Camila Bortolletto
Brookfield, CT

¹ https://edsight.ct.gov/Output/District/HighSchool/0340011_201920.pdf